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Chinese Lyrics

中華琴詩

By Pai Ta-shun

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CHINESE LYRICS

BY PAI TA-SHUN

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Dedication

—

To my Ancestors

NOTE

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PAI TA-SHUN.

Authors' Club,
New York,
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The Flowery Kingdom

WE stood for justice, beauty, love and peace—
Things of the Spirit, mortal and divine.
We wrought our splendor into clay and bronze ;
We fixed on silk the color and subtle line ;
Philosophy, the scholar's lute and captured flowers—
These were our dreams come true—the Spirit's sign.

But from the Steppes the Tartar hordes came down
Behind the blood-red curtains of the West,
Seeking dominion, filled with lust of power,
The murderous dream of empire in their breast—
Until the Flowery Kingdom reared the Wall
That stayed the demon legions from their quest.

Then rose the white disaster in the East,
Red-handed pirates of the Seven Seas,
Friendly with bibles that concealed their guns,
Who killed and plundered through the centuries.
They were our teachers bringing home to us
Their strange "Kultur" that seemed to us disease.

There is no peace for any Land of Flowers
(Flowers of the mind and flowers of the heart),
No peace—yet some day under happier suns
O Righteousness, by human hope and art,
Out of what ashes and what infamies
Shall rise again thine altar torn apart !

Bronze

CAMELS came with copper from the smelters of Ho-nan ;
Elephants and junks with tin from down the roaring Straits :
Gold from Tarshish haply with the year-long caravan ;
Silver from Peru—who knows ?—behind the morning gates.

Naked men of metals dart around the vaulting flames
Where the great stone cauldrons glow and pyres of charcoal burn—
Ancient dark-skinned artists—now we cannot guess their names—
Now we dig to find their relics—sword and bell and urn.

Pottery

TIGER and dragon guarded
The secrets hid in earth,
The shapes hid in the heavens,
Shut out from light and birth.

From the mixed clays and colors
Of far-sought mine and mart
Whirled on the wheel of magic
Grew dream-stuff of the heart.

We wrested from the ages
And wrought in face of death
The rainbow of the spirit
In forms as frail as breath.

At the Fan Shop

MY life is of the city
In the hot thronged bazaars,
Where the motley traders
Sell silks and jades and jars.
Ah, I am of the city
Who would be of the stars!

This morning at the Fan Shop
I chose this cooling snow,
On heights so still in heaven,
On meadows still below,
On trees with burdened branches
Whose peace I may not know.

Absence

How the flowers of the aspen-plum flutter and turn!
Do I not think of you? But your house is distant.
The Master said, "It is the want of thought about it.
How is it distant?"—

Confucian Analects.

THE Spring seems distant with her jasmine-flowers.
The gaunt bare trees with icicles are drest,
The snowbird in the cryptomeria cowers;
Yet—is Spring far when Spring is in my breast?

And you seem far, too far for eye to see
Your lantern and your lattices apart—
So many moons, so many hundred li——
Yet—are you far when you are in my heart?

Homesickness

IT is not the wind in the medlars,
It is not the drifting leaf,
It is not the Three Stars rising
At the end of the autumn brief,
But I see the road to Kinsay
And my heart is full of grief.

Through leagues of perished poppies
And league on league of tea,
Through the winding river gorges
From Thibet to the sea,
To the hoary walls and towers
And great gates swinging free.

From one of the thousand bridges
I heard the biwa's strain
As the golden dragon-barges
Passed and returned again—
I see the road to Kinsay
And my heart is full of pain.

江天暮雪
寒雲江空江欲暮玉屑飛
飛浪花舞暝色初收漢口
帆寒光已失荊門渡宿陰
除天欲低風烟接淡鳥鳴
迷漁蓑衝波豈得已剛破詩
人如品題
嘉清山千九月四日寫於悟
言室中
徵明

The Hermit's Visions

LONG have I followed phantoms
Upon their luring trails,
Down summer-scented meadows
And dream-enamored dales—
And now that they are vanished
What strength or faith avails!

But yet that morning rapture
No night quite dims or mars.
I feel that I shall find them
Beyond the cliffs and scars,
Beyond the Tien-Shan Ranges,
Behind the streams of stars.

Brotherhood

We are all Brothers between the Four Seas—

Confucius.

THE One bethought Him to make man
Of many-colored dust,
And mixed the holy spirit in
In portions right and just;
Each had a part of mind and heart
From One Himself in trust.

Thus came the brown and yellow men
And black and white and red,
So different in their outer look,
Alike in heart and head,
The self-same earth before their birth,
The self-same dust when dead.

Wild Geese

HOW oft against the sunset sky or moon
I watched that moving zig-zag of spread wings
In unforgotten autumns gone too soon,
In unforgotten springs!

Creatures of desolation, far they fly
Above all lands bound by the curling foam;
In misty fens, wild moors and trackless sky
These wild things have their home.

They know the tundra of Siberian coasts,
And tropic marshes by the Indian seas;
They know the clouds and night and starry hosts
From Crux to Pleiades.

Dark flying rune against the western glow—
It tells the sweep and loneliness of things,
Symbol of autumns vanished long ago.
Symbol of coming springs!

The Deserted Garden

I HEAR no more the swish of silk
Along the marble walks;
The autumn wind blows sharp and cold
Among the flowerless stalks.

In place of petals of the peach
Fast drifts the yellow leaf;
And looking in the lotus-pond
I see one face of grief.

The Hermit

AMONG the giant cedars
I have my bamboo hut
Where the gates of heaven are open
And the gates of earth are shut.

With the ancient scrolls to ponder
And music of the kin,
With peace that floods the valleys
And wraps the spirit in.

Nature unrolls her picture
And pageant of earth and sky :
Mountain and mist and sunset
And moon and stars pass by.

There are visions that come, and voices
Within the bamboo hut
Where the gates of heaven are open
And the gates of earth are shut.

Out of Mencius

THE King began his tower
And measured it and planned,
And the people came together
And builded it by hand.

In multitudes they wandered
Outside the pleasure-ground
Where the sleek fat does were lying
And white birds glistened round.

The people died in battle,
Of hunger in the wild.
The King walked in his garden,
The sun looked down and smiled.

The Temple Bell

I HEAR the great bell calling,
Calling with voice of bronze;
The bamboos are aquiver
Along their feathery fronds;
Across the lake the darkness
Makes whiter the white swans.

I hear the great bell calling,
In deep-mouthed undertone,
As if the race that wrought it
Unnumbered and unknown
With dreams to give the ages
Had made its voice their own.

In the Garden

DO you remember, sister,
The golden afternoon
When we looked upon the lotus
And listened to the croon
Of the doves that sat together
Among the flowers of June?

And deep among the valleys
A far, sweet sound was heard—
Some fluter in the forest
That like a magic bird
Sang of the unseen heavens
And mystic Way and Word.

漁浦夕照
湘澤雨歌湘山明千山
落日聞新時多持櫂楔
排屋角時聽款乃水上

Barcarole

SMALL fingers on the silken strings ;
Sunset and rising moon ;
Far hills of lapis, whirr of wings
Of homing birds in June ;
And thou wert there, the twilight on thy brow—
O bitter is the biwa's music now !

Beneath the scented tamarinds
On some celestial trail
We drifted with the purple winds
That filled our sampan sail ;
The purple winds blow once and not again—
O bitter is the biwa's tender strain !

The Heron

BROWN shadows of the camphor,
Gray shadows of the palm,
With flowery moonlight flooding
The pool with silver calm!

All luminous with lotus
Faint ripples lave the sands
Where imaged in the water
A snow-white heron stands!

The Artist's Precept

I WOULD not paint a face
Or rocks or streams or trees—
Mere semblances of things—
But something more than these.

I would not play a tune
Upon the sheng or lute,
Which did not also sing
Meanings that else were mute.

That art is best which gives
To the soul's range no bound ;
Something beside the form,
Something beyond the sound.

The Pai'lou

WITH phœnixes and tigers
And dragons' crooked files,
Faience and wood and marble
Quaint wrought in curious styles,
The three-arched gate—a triptych
That frames the stretching miles—
Still stands a glazed glory
Of multi-colored tiles.

The wind blows through the pai'lou
Like the sound of myriad feet,
And in the ancient thujas
The rustling branches meet
As if a myriad voices
Were murmuring in the street,
The voices of the old time
Ere time had grown so fleet.

The pai'lou stands there lonely
Slow falling to decay,
But where are the red-maned camels
That knew the desert way,
The tilted carts and donkeys,
The throngs in bright array?
Where are the silk-clad maidens,
O Gate of Yesterday?

火市晴嵐
野
香喚客沽雞
南舍北村
朝日山色
日斜人散
墟烟白

Richesse Oblige

The Master said, "There is Hwuy! He has nearly attained to perfect virtue. He is often in want."

—Confucian Analects.

ONCE he had riches,
Now he has none ;
Where is one happier
Under the sun ?

Garments and housing
And fire he brought ;
He fed the hungry,
The ignorant taught.

He raised up the children,
Their bodies remade,
And wrought that their souls
Should soar unafraid.

Hence said the Master,
"This man has indeed
Nearly reached virtue,
He's often in need."

Ghost Foxes

THERE is a pack of foxes
Out in the wintry wood,
Snow-white and still and ghostly.
Is it for ill or good ?

White trees, white earth and whiter
Beneath the deodars,
There stand the still white foxes
And stare at the white stars !

THE TIGER

IN THE fastnesses of earth
He has his lair, he has his birth,
And goes upon his raging course,
Master of elemental force.
He but changes his known form
To ride upon the wings of storm,
And whelm the fields and towns with flood;
He paints the battle-plain with blood;
He ravages with ruthless fire
Piling the forests on his pyre;
He shakes the earth as 'twere a ball
Till temples totter to their fall,
And seas rush in with tidal waves
To whirl the people to their graves;
And often in the guise of pest
He stalks the world round in his quest.
And thus he rages on his course,
Master of elemental force.

The Dragon

EVER-CHANGING the cumulus surges above the horizon,
Black with thunder or white with the glitter of snow-capped mountains,
Rosy with dawn or with sunset, an age-long shifting pageant,
Stuff of chaos for dreamers to forge into magical visions,
Ranged below it the common earth and the tiger-forces,
Behind and above it unfurled the starry deeps of the heavens.
Out of the formless clouds we shaped the deathless Dragon,
Symbol of change and sign of the infinite, symbol of spirit.

The Phoenix

THOU goest down in splendor
O gorgeous Bird of Dawn,
With rose and violet pinions,
Now flaming and now gone!

But from the night's gray ashes
Thou risest up serene,
Immortal and yet mortal
With wings of rainbow sheen.

Far flicker golden feathers
Like rays twixt sky and earth
From out the purple nimbus
That curtains thy rebirth.

The Parrot

A PARROT at my lattice
Came beating starved and thin.
I opened wide the window
And let the starveling in.

And now he preens his feathers,
The many-colored bird,
And tries in vain to utter
A broken happy word.

Is my love dead or dying
On some wild battle plain?
I cannot see the peach-trees
Because of mist and rain.

The Bridge

ACROSS the foaming river
The old bridge bends its bow ;
My father's fathers built it
In ages long ago.

They never left the farmstead
Past which the waters curled.
Why should one ever wander—
When here is all the world :

Family, friends and garden ;
Small fields of rice and tea ;
The cattle in the meadow ;
The birds in stream and tree ;

The pageant of the seasons
As the slow years go by ;
Between the peaks above us
An azure bridge of sky.

Though dead they live and linger
In each familiar place
With kindly thoughts to hearten
The children of their race.

The Waterfall

THE sound of water falling—
The wind's retreating breath—
The whisper through the pinewood—
These say there is no death.

For these are voices speaking
Out of the ancient earth,
The haven of the deathless
Tried or untried through birth.

They speak from out the vastness,
Foreshadowing to man
Nature's divine and secret
Immeasurable plan.

平沙落雁
霜降水落沙清黃蘆葉老千里
旅浦蕭沙平日落雲影薄
飛漠漠江茫茫江寒天遠西風急
沙上霜晴水痕深月明不忍
奴驚江湖無處無沽線

The Island of the Gulls

FAR white flashes on the black storm-clouds ;
Nearer, screaming gulls that ride the storm ;
Stunted pines and cedars bending in the wind ;
In the deep grasses gray nestlings snug and warm.

Dashing in hordes the monsters of the sea
White-and-green-flanked eat the granite shore
Tossing on their horns the bitter foam and brown weed
Trampling the shingle with deafening roar.

Reeling junks fly past like wisps of cloud ;
Sampans scurry homewards in wild alarm,
While the white gulls flash across the dark
Over gray nestlings snug and warm.

On the Mongolian Plains

A SEA of long uplands and hollows
Only known to the loneliest birds,
To the hawks and the curlews and swallows
That follow the wandering herds;

A land where the waterless rivers
Run down between desolate scarps,
Where the wind in the thin grass quivers
And thrums on a myriad harps;

Whether sunshine and blue dome of heaven
Stretch over that infinite space;
Or tempest with thunder and levin
Sweep out on that green sea apace;

Whether oases loom green as beryl
With springs full of solace and charm,
Or thirst and the fires that imperil
Shall lead one to fly from their harm;

Oh give me the life of the prairie,
The spirit, the freedom, to roam,
Where the thoughts are as free as the fairy
And the heart has all space for its home!

Ancestral Voices

OUT of the deeps I hear the old old voices
Calling and commanding me to do their will,
Voices of the legions of the immemorial ages,
Voices of the dead that live with me still.

At the place of tombs and in the pear-garden
Far in the forest, wherever I go—
Out of the deeps I hear the old old voices
Telling me the ways I should walk in and know.

Shrines we made and offerings in house and pagoda;
Carven jades we gave for the dead to hold fast,
Out of the deeps I hear the old old voices,
Mandates to the children from the race that is past.

Cormorant Fishing

WEIRD night of flashing fires
When the cormorants go down
Along the river brown
Before the sampan pyres.

We followed, you and I,
The eerie fleet of flames,
All heedless of their aims,
Beneath the starry sky.

Our boat was full of flowers,
Fragrant with plum and peach,
We whispered each to each
That all the Spring was ours.

Ah, that was long ago!
The river black as night
Flows under no starlight,
And Spring lies deep with snow.

On the Battlefield

HOW many moons shall light the lotus,
How many stars shall rise
To throw their glamour on the garden
Before I see your eyes!

Before I hear again the music
Of plaintive voice and string
Behind your rose-entangled lattice
Where love-birds preen and sing.

O day of battle! I lie wounded
And dreams come shiftingly.
How many moons shall light the garden
That I may never see!

The Chrysanthemum

WE found a mountain flower,
A weed before our eyes,
That proved a ragged fairy,
A princess in disguise.

By some immortal magic
She wears a golden crown,
Irradiating autumn
With the glory of her gown.

We changed the plain field flower
In ages since her birth
Till throngs now pay her homage
With all the kings of earth.

The Chinese Girl in Exile

(*From the Shi-king of 2,000 years ago*)

HE came with golden gifts
And crown and ring;
My people made me wed
The Tartar King.

And now I roam the steppes,
A nomad wife,
Far from my happy home—
I hate the life!

I hate the felt-walled tent,
I hate the meat,
I hate the wild mare's milk—
Life once was sweet.

O thou far yellow crane
In heaven's blue dome,
Give me thy wings to fly
Back to my home!

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